



# Glossary of Legal Terms

Adjourned or Recess	Judge stops or suspends court for the day or until a later date.
Attorney	A person who represents a plaintiff or defendant in court or outside of court in a legal matter; also referred to as a lawyer or counsel.
Beyond a Reasonable Doubt	The highest level of proof required to win a case. Necessary to get a guilty verdict in criminal cases.
Burden of Proof	The duty of a party in a lawsuit to persuade the judge or the jury that enough facts exist to prove the allegations of the case.
Bill of Indictment or Complaint	A formal charge against someone made in court and a claim that someone has done wrong.
Conviction	The result of a criminal trial in which a person is found guilty.
Court	The place where a trial is held or another way of referring to the judge.
Courtroom Clerk or Deputy Clerk	The person who calls the court to order and swears in witnesses.
Court reporter	A person who types every word said during the trial. The typewritten document is a permanent record of the trial.
Court Security Officer or CSO	The officer who screens visitors as they come in the federal courthouse. They also maintain order in the court. In state court, they are referred to as Bailiffs.
Crime	The act of breaking the law.
Criminal Trial	A way to decide who is guilty of breaking the law.
Cross Examination	The questioning of a witness by the lawyer for the opposing side.
Defendant	A person who is being sued or accused of breaking the law.
Direct-examination	The first questioning in a trial of a witness by the lawyer who called that witness. Something which shows or proves a fact.
Evidence	Information presented that is used to persuade the judge or jury.
Exhibit	A document or other item introduced as evidence during a trial or hearing.
Federal Court	The court that is organized under the Constitution and laws of the federal government of the United States.
Felony	A serious criminal offense.

Grand Jury	A jury of inquiry whose duty it is to receive complaints and accusations in criminal matters and if appropriate issue a formal indictment.
Hung Jury	A jury whose members cannot agree upon a verdict.
Indictment	An accusation of a crime, made against a person by a grand jury upon the request of a prosecutor.
Judge	The person who is in charge of the court and who decides questions of law.
Jury	A group of people who listen to the evidence at a trial and decide if the law has been broken.
Jury Foreperson	A person who is a member of the jury and will act as lead juror. This person hands the verdict to the judge.
Jury Trial	Usually made up of six to twelve people, that listens to testimony from both the plaintiff and defendant's side and decides the verdict of a case.
Law Clerk	An attorney who provides a judge, magistrate, or lawyer with assistance in legal research.
Lawsuit	A case before a court.
Magistrate Judge	A judge who hears all preliminary criminal matters, but does not conduct felony trials. If all parties consent, civil trials and criminal misdemeanor trials can be heard by them.
Misdemeanor	A criminal offense that is lesser than a felony.
Mistrial	A trial that becomes invalid, is essentially canceled, because of a mistake in procedure.
Motion	How a lawyer asks the judge to make a decision.
Objection	The lawyer is in conflict or does not agree with something being said in court.
Overruled	Judge rules against or disallows the lawyer's objection.
Plaintiff	A person who starts a lawsuit.
Prosecutor	The lawyer who represents the United States of America (or the state) in a criminal trial. This lawyer must show that the defendant committed a crime.
Sentence	The punishment given to a person who has been convicted of a crime.
Sustained	Judge favored or accepted the doubt or objection offered by the lawyer.
Verdict	The decision made by the jury in a trial.
Witness	A person who goes to court to tell the truth about what he or she has seen or knows about a crime or other situation.
Your Honor	The way a judge is addressed in a courtroom.